

Mass violent protests rock Turkish Kurdistan

17 April 2006

A World to Win News Service. Starting at the end of March the Kurdish area of Turkey witnessed a week of mass upheaval and fighting with police and gendarme troops on a scale unprecedented in recent years and maybe longer. Clashes between some 10,000 protestors and police broke out on 27 March in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in eastern Turkey after the funeral of 14 Kurdish nationalist guerrillas killed by government forces. Thousands of stone-throwing youth, with the support of a great deal of the local population according to reports, attacked police stations and other government targets over a three-day period, until the government sent in gendarme troops to occupy the city. Some clashes continued after that. There was also serious fighting in the Kurdish cities of Batman, 80 kilometres to the east, and Kiziktepe, near the border with Syria, and in Istanbul itself, following a protest by Kurds.

The Turkish government has been carrying out armed operations against the Kurdish nation and in particular Kurdish guerrilla forces associated with the PKK nationalist organisation for many years. (Although the Kurdish Workers Party changed its name to Kongra-Gel a few years ago when it left its claims to Marxism behind, it is still widely known by its old initials). The government never ceased military operations in the area even though following the US-assisted capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK withdrew their forces to the Kurdish area in Northern Iraq and repeatedly called for peace negotiations. PKK ceased all armed operations for five years, until 2004. The Turkish state, more or less openly dominated by the National Security Council made up of the top military chiefs, responded to these calls for peace by labelling the PKK “terrorist”. The U.S. government and the European Union backed Turkey in this regard.

Feelings in the Kurdish areas of Turkey were already simmering after a series of bombings in the Semdinli area, where several people were killed. The last of these was an attack on a bookstore during which some vigilant ordinary Kurdish people were able to capture the perpetrators red-handed in the act, only for it to turn out that they were members of the Turkish army intelligence section, called Jitem (Jendarmerie Intelligence Service). One of them was a former PKK guerrilla who had turned traitor and was used by Turkish intelligence. It then became apparent that a number of bombings that had been blamed on the PKK were in fact the work of Turkish intelligence – outraging not only millions of Kurds but also many Turkish people too. General Yasar Buyukkanit, the no 2 man in the Turkish army, made a media statement that he personally knew the men who had been caught carrying out the bombings and that “they are good boys”. Everyone understood this to be a way of putting a cloak of protection over these murderers.

People felt that they had right on their side, that they had caught the perpetrators red-handed, and that there was no reason to expect justice from the very state that was in fact behind the crimes in the first place. Heated street battles against the police erupted throughout the area. This also led to infighting among the ruling class forces, particularly between the military and the Justice and Development party, the Islamic party heading the government. A local prosecutor in Van even prepared an indictment against General Buyukkanit for going outside established channels to organise his own vigilante gang. This led to an uproar of protest from military men and hard-

liners, broadcast widely in the media, basically saying how dare this prosecutor make such scandalous claims against the men who are responsible for defending our country. These military figures alleged that the prosecutor was providing indirect support to the “terrorists”.

This was the setting for the vicious attack on 26 March by the Turkish army, which massacred a group of 14 PKK guerrillas using chemical bombs in the North Kurdistan mountains near the border with Iraq. The Turkish army denied the use of the chemical weapons, which violates international law. However, family members of the dead guerrillas saw the bodies, and exposed what actually took place. Their accounts were convincing enough to be widely reported in the Kurdish media. When the bodies of the guerrillas arrived back in Diyarbakir, many thousands of people attended the funerals. This has been seen as a time to strike back at a harsh clampdown meant to crush the Kurdish movement in general. Repressive measures have hit all the Kurdish organisations in Turkey, including the DTP (the Democratic Society Party), the legal Kurdish nationalist party, and the mayor of Diyarbakir.

The police tried to prevent people from attending the funeral, which caused even more anger, and led to widespread fighting between youth and police. The police killed four children and nine adults in the course of the street clashes.

Hundreds were arrested, including some supporters of the Maoist Communist Party of Turkey/North Kurdistan (MKP). Ilyas Aktas, a young journalist in Diyarbakir for the Maoist newspaper *Devrimci Demokrasi*, was shot in the head by the police and fell into a coma. On 11 April, his doctors announced that he was on life support and brain dead, with no hope for recovery.

On 9 April, 2,000 people marched through East London to protest the government’s attacks and express solidarity with the Kurdish people’s struggle. Many thousands more took to the streets in Germany, Switzerland and throughout northern Europe.

The MKP issued a statement that declared “its unconditional support for the legitimate, democratic demands of the Kurdish nationalist struggle and their right to resist the Turkish fascist regime to secure those rights – and that ultimately it is only through new democratic revolution that the Kurdish nation can achieve genuine liberation”.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, April 19th, 2006

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